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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7640
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 8994
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 2346
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE 5054
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA IMMEDIATE 3198
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA IMMEDIATE 5612
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE IMMEDIATE 6843
RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO IMMEDIATE 3923
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUALSFJ/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA IMMEDIATE
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/DISA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEATRS/TREASURY DEPT WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI IMMEDIATE 6660

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 004327

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SUBJECT: FUKUDA CONSOLIDATES LEAD IN WEEKEND CAMPAIGNING

Classified By: AMBASSADOR J. THOMAS SCHIEFFER, REASONS 1.4(B),(D).

¶1. (C) Summary. The race to succeed Shinzo Abe as LDP President and Prime Minister looks to be a win for former Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda, with weekend polls showing he has a commanding lead over Taro Aso among LDP Diet members and the public. Fukuda has the backing of nearly 60 percent of LDP lawmakers. Opinion polls indicate Fukuda has 55-60 percent support from the public, twice Aso's levels. The winner of the LDP election will be elected Prime Minister and form a Cabinet on September 25. End summary.

Fukuda Closes in on Margin of Victory

¶2. (C) According to a Yomiuri survey of LDP Diet members conducted over the weekend and published on September 17, Fukuda has the publicly declared support of 213 of 387 LDP Diet members. Only 45 LDP lawmakers support Aso in the same poll. Each of the 387 LDP Diet members -- 304 in the Lower House and 83 in the Upper House -- will have one vote in the LDP presidential election on September 23. Based on the results of the Yomiuri poll, Fukuda has locked up nearly 60 percent of the LDP Diet vote. Fukuda needs to win a simple majority of 265 votes on September 23 to succeed Shinzo Abe as LDP President. Government and ruling party spokesmen have indicated that the winner of the LDP election will be elected Prime Minister and announce his Cabinet on September 25.

LDP Chapters Firm Up Plans

¶3. (C) Each of the 47 LDP prefectural chapters is accorded three votes for LDP President, but can cast those votes according to its own rules. In Osaka, for example, the local LDP organization has decided to take a preliminary vote among its members and then apportion its three votes on a proportional basis among the two candidates. Other prefectures, such as Ehime, say they will give all three votes to the winner of the preliminary vote by its members. In Fukuoka, the home turf of Taro Aso, the top executives of

the local chapter have already decided to allocate their three votes to Aso, without putting the matter to a membership vote. With 213 of the LDP Diet member votes already in his column, Fukuda needs just 53 of the 141 LDP chapter votes. Several younger Diet members have stated publicly that they will cast their own votes based on the results of the chapter votes in their home districts.

Fukuda Grabs Sizable Lead in Polls

14. (C) Fukuda has taken a commanding lead in public opinion polls. A Yomiuri poll conducted over the weekend showed 58 percent of respondents nationwide in favor of Fukuda as the next Prime Minister, with only 22 percent opting for Aso. Fukuda out-pollled Aso across all major demographics, but was particularly strong among female respondents. Poll numbers published in the Asahi and Sankei were nearly identical, with all three survey results showing even higher support for Fukuda among respondents identifying themselves as LDP supporters. In the Asahi poll, over 60 percent said they wanted the next Prime Minister to be a "cooperative" type, as opposed to a "decisive" type. Fukuda has stressed his willingness to take a cooperative approach with the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in campaign statements. The same percentage said they chose Fukuda for his "stable" image. Public opinion is unlikely to sway individual Diet members in their votes, but may give some indication of the prevailing mood among LDP members at the prefectural level.

TOKYO 00004327 002 OF 002

Little Difference in Domestic Policy Approach

15. (C) Policy pledges by the two candidates during weekend campaigning reveal few significant differences in their approach to key issues. Both say they are committed to continuing on the path of economic and fiscal reform, but acknowledge the need to deal with the economic and social dislocations and disparities that are seen to be the negative outgrowth of those reforms. The main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) seized upon the disparities issue to gain support from disaffected voters in the July Upper House elections. The candidates have focused primarily on measures to continue economic growth and fiscal restraint, but have also indicated the possible need to consider a tax increase.

----- Foreign Policy: U.S. Still Central, but Differences on DPRK, China -----

16. (C) On the international front, both acknowledge the central role of the U.S.-Japan alliance in Japan's foreign policy and the importance of stable relations with Asian neighbors, but Fukuda has been more dovish on foreign affairs. In particular, weekend press reports played up Fukuda's willingness to pursue "dialogue" with the DPRK, in contrast to Aso's preference for "pressure." Fukuda is also much more attentive to relations with China. Fukuda differs sharply from Aso on the status of Yasukuni Shrine. He has made clear that he will not visit the shrine as Prime Minister, and has called for construction of a secular memorial. Aso, for his part, continues to push his "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" initiative as a means of flexing Japan's diplomatic muscle. Both candidates have clearly articulated support for anti-terror legislation aimed at authorizing the continuation of refueling efforts by Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF) in the Indian Ocean. Schieffer